



(ongoing collaborative SF story that will be continued and updated periodically)

Premise:

This is a road trip tale with an undercurrent about how one man can make a difference. The protagonists are a cyborg (Cutter / male) and a romantic performance artist (Pixil / female). Our story begins in a port city (Majona) on a lost planet (Aleo-Tau).

Part One

Cutter had seven days before the girl died. If he could find her. It was proving to be more difficult than first expected. Majona was crowded with the refuse left over from the Triaxial War. Even Pixil, in her gold silk robe, looked dreary on the hulking gray landing platform, though her foot still tapped to some inner music.

Even if he assumed it would be dangerous, Cutter knew he had to contact the Guild. However much he hated them - each and every occupant of that blasted Guild. He didn't like asking for help; it seemed like an admission of weakness, and he'd had enough of that lying in the hospital after they replaced certain key parts of him in order to save a life he wasn't sure he wanted. But he knew in order to save her, he was going to ask for help no matter what his personal feelings were.

A rumble, deep and frightening, shook the platform. No time to think about anything - they were here! Pixil pulled her robe back over her shoulders and ran off the stage. It was imperative that they not recognize her.

Heart pounding, she flattened herself against the side of a building. She held her breath, fearing that someone would hear her. Phantasmagoric shadows danced across her vision, and then something sharp and slick dug into the tender skin of her neck.

Oh God, this was it, she was going to die, where the hell was Cutter?

"Finding you wasn't as easy as I thought it would be," a deep male voice whispered, his hot breath on her neck sending a shiver down her spine.

Cutter grabbed her arm and pulled her towards the back of the building. "Come on we need to get the hell out of here before someone else catches you," Cutter said.

"If I wanted to be easily found, you great big *trachar*, I wouldn't be working in a midget performance club!" Pixel snapped and pulled her arm free of his iron grip.

She couldn't help but think of the last time Cutter decided to take charge of her life. She still had nightmares about it. Controlling ex-boyfriends had a completely different meaning when parts of your brain could be wiped and reprogrammed in under an hour.

But this wasn't the time to be rehashing the past, if Cutter had found her, the others couldn't be far behind and it was time to hoik up her robes and run.

She had to find a way to ditch Cutter.

Cutter could tell Pixel was getting ready to ditch him by the way her slanty green eyes scanned the area. When would she realise she needed him? But he didn't expect what happened next.

"Is that you, Cutter, you %#2&%, you still owe me a a gronzite of federation credits, a drink, and half a giraffe!" came the unmistakable whine of 888J.

Cutter closed his eyes for a second cursing his luck. *Where the fuck was he supposed to get a giraffe? Nevermind, half one?*

Cutter flashed a look in Pixil's direction making her roll her eyes as she flatly stated, "I swear bad luck follows you like a plague."

"Admit it, Pixil, you can't get enough of me, just watch this."

With a forced smile, Cutter swung an arm over 888J's rather slimy shoulders, shuddering when one tentacle brushed his side; he knew the easiest way to get an audience with The Guild was through this creature. "If I give you the whole giraffe, will you do something for me? Will you help me get her out of here?"

888J looked at Cutter shrewdly, and as if wondering if he would get screwed again. The grey tentacle that traced his ear in a Ferluvian truth-test didn't detract from his peripheral vision; Cutter snatched a handful of gold silk and dragged Pixil to his side.

Cutter thought, *although how I'm going to smuggle a giraffe into this city is going to be tricky*. Pixil huffed and tried to swat his hands off her arm, to no avail. Cutter laughed at Pixil's pathetic attempt to escape him, so to shut her up, he planted his lips against her own. Hoping their display had distracted the notoriously prudish Ferluvian, and making sure he kept a tight grip on Pixil, Cutter reached for his gun.

Pixil stood frozen in shock while Cutter playfully bit her bottom lip. As the shock wore off, she remembered that kissing was **NOT** why she broke up with him. The fact that he had grabbed and kissed her while in a public place running for their lives, however, was a big part of the reason. For reasons she couldn't understand she wanted him so bad right now she couldn't think straight.

Pixil pulled Cutter in closer and whispered one simple word in his ear. "Now," she breathed, and ducked behind him; Ferluvian life plasma was hell to get out of silk and there was no way 888J would do what Cutter wanted without some violence involved, even with a whole herd of giraffes to sweeten the deal.

A bright flash seared her retinas. Since he was known for his marksmanship, she couldn't believe her eyes.

He'd missed? Dammit, how'd did he miss?

"I didn't want to have to do this but it looks like I don't have a choice," Pixil muttered.

"Hey Ferluvian!" she yelled lifting up her skirt, reaching for the sliver tipped dagger she kept in her garter belt.

Silently thanking the months she had spent working on the trapeze at the performance club, Pixil jumped through the air, dagger in hand. With deadly accuracy, the blade penetrated the Ferluvian's chest.

Which did not please Cutter considering the look he was giving her but more trouble was on the way just behind him.

"Shit me!" Pixel exclaimed while terrified midget performers from the show scattered like small, terrified *mewbs*

Behind them, seeming even more unfeasibly tall by comparison to the midgets, three Parthwa giants stalked towards Pixil and Cutter.

"Dammit!" Cutter muttered as he decided what to do. They were surrounded.

Pixil wasn't going to like what he was about to do, but he didn't see another option.

'Here,' he bellowed, shoving Pixil in front of him, 'take her, she's almost as good as half a giraffe!' and hoping to sweet Zurgliff the hopping midgets would obstruct his species-specific nerve gas pellets from the giants' sightline.

Pixil squeaked in outrage and whacked Cutter in the back of his head with her palm. Cutter turned to Pixil and raised his eyebrow. Cutter waited until the giants were almost on top of them before releasing the gas pellets. He then realized maybe he shouldn't have waited quite that long when one almost fell on top of him.

Cutter ducked out of the way of the last loose pellet as the gas pellets created a screen of green smoke and Cutter and Pixil took off at a dead run in the opposite direction.

Pixil shouted over to Cutter, "I hate you!"

To which he replied, grabbing her hand, "Yeah, I know." Cutter grinned as he hauled ass towards the exit, dragging Pixil behind him. He knew Pixil found him irresistible, no matter what she said.

But they had more pressing business to attend than their lost love life—like saving her life and the planet. Now if only he could remember where he had parked his spaceship! Pixil stumbled as Cutter suddenly stopped and looked around, muttering to himself.

"What now?" Pixil exclaimed, as she let out a deep sigh waiting for the next big catastrophe to hit them.

Cutter snapped "I can't remember where I parked!"

A second later, Pixil snickered. When Cutter tried to pull on her hair for retaliation, she smoothly ducked. She grabbed his right pinkie finger and pulled hard. With a click it detached. Wiggling his little finger under his nose Pixel stated: "The stress is getting to you, old Cyborg. You forgot you got a remote."

With two clicks of the end of his finger she located his ship at the far end of the platform.

"Whatever you do, don't lose that finger!" Cutter yelled as they raced toward the safety of his ship.

"What, *this* finger..." she mocked him, dangling it out in front of her.

"Oops" was her next comment as the remote control digit fell from her grasp and slid down a grate with a distinct, echoing splash

Pixil continued running after Cutter-hoping he hadn't noticed anything- when suddenly, a loud explosion from below the grate nearly knocked them off their feet.

It had started; they now had 48hours before they were irremediably screwed!And not the kind he was hoping for.

"Damn it, Pixil, I told you to be careful with that!" Cutter growled at her as he pushed her on the spaceship.

"Oops," said Pixil, smiling sweetly or perhaps evilly, Cutter couldn't quite tell which.

And just when he thought he was going to have a chance at figuring out that look, all hell broke loose.

Cutter slammed his hand over the control panel shutting the door behind them, just as a pirate ship buzzed over them firing at the platform making it rock with impact.

"We seem to be encountering hostility, Captain," said Sam the chronically redundant ship's computer.

[To be continued...]